



Conway Club Senior Hand

A chance remark last summer led to Club President Tom Mason deciding to find out who the Club's Senior Hand was. Every Club event names the Senior Hand present, so it was odd that no-one knew who the Club's Senior Hand was.

The membership list produced nine names who attended Conway earlier than George Hunt (30-32), at that time the earliest OC known to be alive. *The Cadet* had not been returned from these addresses, so maybe they were all alive? Our membership secretary sent letters, and trawled through electoral registers, family history websites and Post Office phone books. We learned that three had died, one in 2005 and the other two as long ago as 1976 and 1987! Nobody had told us and goodness knows what happened to their *Cadets*. We then learned that Cdr HC Gowan (29-30) was still alive. For a while, it looked as if he would be the Senior Hand, then we managed to find a new address for Lt Cdr GWO Howe who pre-dated Cdr Gowan by a year. Then we received a letter from Lt Cdr Roderick de Cazalet Knight who attended Conway from September 1925, shortly after his 14th birthday, until June or July 1927. Further research by John Southwood (55-57) has confirmed that Rod is indeed our Senior Hand.

Rod is a spritely 100-year-old and as he uses e-mail, most further communication has been via that medium. He now lives in British Columbia and says he is 'as active and as healthy as I have been all my life since childhood'. John Southwood persuaded Merseyside Maritime Museum, which holds all Conway records, to copy Rod's. These showed an excellent executive report and that Rod achieved an Extra Leaving Certificate. These copies, and a message from the Club, were sent to Rod to mark his 100th birthday last August, along with Volume 1 of the *Conway Gazette*, published by Friends of Conway and containing a selection of letters sent to the Ship by OCs, documenting their life at sea.

Rod e-mailed Tom in thanks:

'Finally managed a picture (*above*); dressed for a friend's wedding. Blazer a carry over from '27 when I joined the Club. The only club I ever joined. A bit tight now. Many thanks for the items you sent me last month. The information was of great interest for me and the family. And yes, I did enjoy my time in the old Ship; which isn't to say I didn't have bad days. School days are never all beer and skittles, as you undoubtedly know. The 1st volume of the *Conway Gazette* was most interesting. Reading it confirmed my belief that I made the right decision when I turned down the chance to join the 4-masted barque *Hougamont*, one of the last working ships under sail. She was up from Australia via some South American ports, and was in Vancouver loading grain for Europe. I believe she was lost somewhere in the Atlantic before she made port. I have been writing my memoirs for the past several years; a slow process. Not for publication, merely for my children to know where they came from. There may be bits and pieces of interest to *The Cadet*. Tomorrow, at dawn, I fly away to the Big Island of Hawaii, for a winter get-away. I'll see what I can do as I bask under the tropical sun.'

